

75. PELICAN. (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*.)

One shot on the 1st of June, 1883: a regular visitant in May, when several were seen. A skin was sent to Mr. Hume.

76. CORMORANT. (*Phalacrocorax*, sp. inc.)

A brown Cormorant seen in numbers on a detached rock below the lighthouse at Marshag.

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V.—Notes on the Birds of the Upper Engadine.

By HENRY SEEBOHM.

It is a long climb from the plains of Lombardy to the valley of the Upper Engadine. Lake Como is a little more than a thousand feet above the level of the sea; a further climb of rather more than fifteen hundred feet brings the traveller to Promontogno, and a long two thousand feet more lands him at Casaccia, but there is still more than one thousand feet of zigzags before the top of the Maloja Pass is reached. The new Maloja Hotel is perhaps the finest in Switzerland; it is nearly six thousand feet above the level of the sea, and forms a centre of unusual interest. From a geographical point of view it may be regarded as on the water-parting between the Italian and Austrian river-systems (the one leading through the Valley of the Po to the Adriatic, and the other through that of the Danube to the Black Sea), whilst it is less than six miles from the valley of the Rhine, and only about sixty miles from the source of the Rhone. To the geologist the scarped and scored rocks on the Kulm (the culminating point of the pass) and the heaps of gravel and the piles of granite boulders point out the course of the ancient glacier, now shrunk back a thousand feet up the Forno valley, with little but its moraines to tell the tale of its former greatness. The artist may find views, too grand for transference to paper or canvas, by ascending any of the smaller spurs of the mountains, whence he can look down a couple of thousand feet towards Italy, or by passing along the chain of lakes to St. Moritz, or by climbing up the icy peak of the Pitz Bernina,

13,300 feet above the level of the sea. To the botanist the Maloja Hotel forms a base of operations where, even in August, the spring alpine flora may be worked without too much climbing, as it is situated almost at the limit of forest-growth. The commonest trees are small examples of the Siberian cedar (*Pinus cembra*), and the larch and spruce are small and stunted. On the other hand the rhododendrons are in all their splendour, especially in June and early in July. In August it requires a climb of from one to two thousand feet to reach the most characteristic alpine plants—the deep blue gentians on the grass, the rarer saxifrages on the rocks, and the beautiful purple toad-flax (*Linaria alpina*) on the screes. Higher still the almost stalkless alpine forms of the cobalt-blue forget-me-not, the white stitchwort, and the prussian-blue rampion (*Phyteuma*) vie in beauty with the deep-red flowers of the alpine campion, the pale-pink soldanella, and the grey edelweis.

The agriculture of the Upper Engadine is extremely simple. The valley is meadow broken up with rock, and the mountain is rock interspersed with pasture. From the former two or three crops of hay are cut every season, and on the latter flocks of sheep and herds of cows and goats graze. On the approach of winter men, cattle, and hay migrate down the pass almost into Italy.

The birds of this district are comparatively few, but amongst them are several of special interest to the British ornithologist. Amongst the pines the most interesting species are the Nutcracker (*Nucifraga caryocatactes*), the Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*), and the Mealy Redpole (*Fringilla linaria*). On the meadows and pasture Alpine Pipits (*Anthus spinoletta*) abound, and on the rocks Black Redstarts (*Ruticilla tithys*) are common. Occasionally a Wall-creeper (*Tichodroma muraria*) may be seen in a narrow gorge, flitting like a butterfly on the face of the precipice, and still more rarely a passing glimpse of an Alpine Swift (*Cypselus melba*) may be caught as it dashes past the crumbling granite or serpentine amidst the ice and snow of the higher peaks. Both the Common Sandpiper (*Totanus hypoleucus*) and the Marsh-

Sandpiper (*Totanus stagnatilis*) frequent the shores of the lakes in the company of numerous White Wagtails (*Motacilla alba*). On the mountain-streams the Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla sulphurea*) is common, and the Mediterranean form of the Water-Ouzel (*Cinclus aquaticus albigollis*) ascends them up to eight thousand feet above the level of the sea. I saw Ring-Ouzels (*Merula torquata*) among some alders behind the hotel, now and then a pair of Kestrels (*Falco tinnunculus*) were to be seen hovering over the valley, and once I watched for some time an Icterine Warbler (*Hypolais hypolais*) in a larch tree just below the head of the pass. The Crested Tit (*Parus cristatus*) was not quite so common as its congeners, and, curiously enough, I saw no trace of the ubiquitous Sparrow. Chaffinches (*Fringilla cælebs*) were remarkably abundant, and frequently uttered a note which I have never heard in this country : it might be represented by the letters *rrt*. The Carrion-Crow (*Corvus corone*), when it emigrated from East Siberia, evidently ascended the Danube and the Inn and reached North Italy, thus isolating the Hooded Crows of Southern Italy and Greece from the main colony in East Europe and West Siberia. We saw the former every day, but we did not meet with either the Rook, the Magpie, or the Hooded Crow. On the other hand, a small flock of Choughs (*Pyrrhocorax graculus*) frequented the shores of the lake, and parties of Alpine Choughs (*Pyrrhocorax alpinus*) sometimes came suddenly upon us as we were gathering alpine flowers in the mountain-clefts, to their great surprise and evident consternation. Ravens (*Corvus corax*) were occasionally seen, but no Jackdaws.

I did not succeed in finding either the Ptarmigan or the Snow-Finch, but was extremely delighted to make the acquaintance of the Alpine Accentor (*Accentor alpinus*). This bird was by no means common, and was extremely local; but I met with it on three occasions, and was able to solve several knotty points in its habits which have always been a puzzle to me. I am not aware that any British ornithologist has described its habits from personal observation, and as it was one of the few European birds which was not personally

known to Naumann, our knowledge of it is meagre in the extreme. All my efforts to discover it failed until the 14th of August, when our party ascended the Pitz Lunghino (9120 feet) in order to trace the Inn to its source. For the first thousand feet above the Maloja the Pipits and Black Redstarts were the commonest birds, but after we had passed above the last stunted bush and had nearly reached the gentian and soldanella ground, an unfamiliar note caught my ear, a rich liquid *chich, ich, ich, ich*, as gurgling as the note of the Lark. I soon caught sight of the bird perched upon a rock, scarcely to be distinguished at a distance from an Alpine Pipit. My first thought was that it must be one of those birds making a feeble effort to sing; but in a short time the bird came much nearer, and began to hop about, sometimes on the short grass, but more often on the rocks. The fact of its hopping like a Robin, instead of running like a Wagtail, proved that it could not be a Pipit; but fortunately it possessed one habit in common with that bird, namely, a propensity to indulge its curiosity. We sat quite still, and presently it flew to a rock not more than thirty feet from us, where its rich chestnut flanks could be seen without glasses. It was exceedingly tame and did not seem at all alarmed at our presence, though it was apparently watching us. A writer quoted by Naumann says that the Alpine Accentor does not hop but runs. This is unquestionably a mistake. There can be no doubt whatever that its favourite mode of progression is a hop: I made a note of the fact in my pocket-book in the presence of the bird itself; thus one of the alleged discrepancies between its habits and those of its cousin, our common Hedge-Sparrow, was disposed of. Another alleged fact respecting the Alpine Accentor is that it ducks its head and jerks up its tail every time it utters its note, after the manner of the Chats. The fact also that it lays blue eggs, like the Chats, suggested a relationship to those birds. The alleged fact is, however, a myth. I heard the Alpine Accentor utter its note at least fifty times, and I could perceive nothing of the habit alluded to. On the other hand, the Black Redstart (which, with its

relatives, is allowed by courtesy to set up a genus distinct from the Chats) acts precisely in the manner described, and as it frequents the same locality, it is not unlikely that the habits of a female Black Redstart have been transferred to the Alpine Accentor. The flight of the latter bird is performed with very pronounced and very short undulations. A week afterwards I had an opportunity of watching a pair of Alpine Accentors searching for food on the rocks. They creep about among the stones, and almost in the same way that the Hedge-Sparrow shuffles along amongst the roots and the tree-trunks. When they alighted on a rock they did so with expanded wings and outspread tail, sometimes approaching the ground in a curve, in both particulars resembling a Starling. The note was occasionally uttered on the wing.

The Pipit was extremely common on the pastures, and still more so on the meadows after the hay had been removed. Some of the young seemed to be only recently fledged, and their parents were still very anxious about them. We devoted nearly an hour to one pair of birds, as their actions appeared to signify that the young had not yet left the nest. The hen bird had caught a moth, which she was anxious to convey to her children, and stood with it in her beak, afraid to reveal the whereabouts of her nest. For a long time she remained perched on a rock, then occupied alternately the summits of two small larches, then returned again to the rock, and occasionally flew up to within a few yards of where we were sitting, and hovered near us to examine us more minutely. All this time she kept up, in spite of the moth in her beak, her monotonous alarm-note, *sit, sit, sit*, sometimes stopping to call to her mate, who did not venture so near us, with a soft *ist, ist*. She may, after all, not have had a nest: at any rate she tired us out, and we gave up the quest.

The Black Redstarts were also very demonstrative, many of them having still scarcely fledged young. Their alarm-note of *tek, tek, tek* was very often heard, and not unfrequently their call-note, *tzi, tzi, tzi*. One of these birds had

a nest in a cleft of the rocks not more than a hundred yards from the hotel, and was sitting on two pure-white eggs as late as the 10th of August: no doubt a second brood. The Black Redstarts were very expert at catching flies in the air.

On the way home we stopped a few days at Constance. Close to the Insel Hotel is a most interesting aviary, full of Ducks, Geese, and Swans. Among the former were a pair of Pochards and a pair of Tufted Ducks, perfectly tame, though able to fly. A branch of the Rhine runs through this aviary, and the observer can lean over the iron railings and look down into the blue-green water and see the weeds at the bottom. It was very curious to watch the Ducks dive; their wings were never used; everything was done by their feet, and hard enough they worked. With their outspread toes as a fulcrum, they made a headlong dive into the water, and as they somewhat slowly but steadily descended to the bottom, their feet were working as hard as they could go against the natural buoyancy of their bodies. As soon as they had gathered as much weed as they wanted, they raised their heads, stopped the rapid motions of their feet, and soon rose like corks to the surface. At other times they seemed to be fast asleep on the surface of the water, the head snugly tucked under the wing, and one foot apparently moving mechanically to prevent them from drifting down with the current. Sometimes they spent hours preening their feathers whilst swimming, occasionally almost lying on their backs in the water to smooth out the feathers of the underparts. I have never seen any place where the habits of these birds could be so easily observed.

At St. Gall I paid a visit to Dr. Girtanner, and was much interested in three or four Wall-creeper which he had in a cage. He told me that they moulted out of their first plumage in their first autumn, and acquired the black on the underparts early in spring.